

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6929

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SYDNEY 1014

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT PARA 1)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, AS

REF: SYDNEY 0874, SYDNEY 0701

1. AFTER AN UNREMARKABLE CAMPAIGN NEW SOUTH WALES
VOTERS GO TO THE POLLS TOMORROW IN WHAT APPEARS TO BE
A CONTEST SO NARROW THAT PREDICTION IS MEANINGLESS.
LIBERAL PARTY POLITICIANS IN PRIVATE TEND TO PREDICT
THAT THEY WILL RETAIN OFFICE BY THE SAME OF SLIGHTLY
LESS MAJORITY. COUNTRY PARTY POLITICIANS ARE MORE
OPTIMISTIC BECAUSE THEY FORESEE THE CHANCE TO GAIN
PERHAPS TWO SEATS AWAY FROM LABOR. LABOR PARTY
POLITICIANS IN PRIVATE TENT TO SHY AWAY FROM
PREDICTING VICTORY BYT DO EXPECT TO IMPROVE THEIR
POSITION.

2.THE PUBLISHED POLLS TEND TO FAVOR LABOR
SLIGHTLY ALTHOUGH LIBERALS CLAIM PRIVATE POLLS CONTRADICE
THIS. STATISTICALLY LABOR FACES A DIFFICULT UPHILL
STRUGGLE SINCE TO WIN A MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT THEY
NEED APPROXIMATELY A 5 PERCENT SWING TO THEIR SIDE
WHEREAS THE COALITION CAN SUFFER A NEGATIVE SWING OF
4 PERCENT AND STILL STAY IN OFFICE. CONVERSELY A
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STATISTICAL SWING OF ONLY 2 PERCENT AGAINST LABOR

MIGHT GAIN THE GOVERNMENT 7 SEATS. LOCAL FACTORS, HOWEVER, WILL BLUR THE STATISTICAL PATTERN.

3. THE CAMPAIGN HAS PRODUCED FEW SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES:

A. THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE THAT HAS EMERGED IN THE CAMPAIGN IS THE ISSUE OF TAXATION RELATIVE TO THE LIBERALS "NEW FEDERALISM" PROGRAM. WHILE THE COALITION GOVERNMENT CAN BOAST OF A LARGER FEDERAL SUBSIDY THIS YEAR, THEY ARE EMBARRASSED BY HAVING TO EXPLAIN THAT THE "NEW FEDERALISM" WILL NOT REPEAT NOT RESULT IN DOUBLE TAXATION THROUGH AN ADDITIONAL STATE INCOME TAX LEVY ON TOP OF THE FEDERAL ONE. PREMIER WILLIS HAS GIVEN ASSURANCES THAT ANY STATE INCOME TAX WILL ONLY REPLACE REDUCED OR AVANDONED INDIRECT TAXATION. HOWEVER, OPPOSITION LEADER WRAN HAS ARGUED THAT "THE NEW FEDERALISM" WOULD ONLY AUTHORIZE A STATE INCOME TAX IF IT WAS INTENDED TO IMPOSE ONE.

B. THE COALITION HAS TRIED WITH ONLY MODEST SUCCESS TO STICK THE SOCIALIST LABEL OF CERTAIN ALP PLATFORM PLANKS ONTO WRAN, FOR EXAMPLE, THE 35 HOUR WEEK AND PROGRESSIVE SOCIALIST TAKEOVER OF PRIVATE INDUSTRY. THE EFFECT WAS APPARENTLY SUFFICIENT TO CAUSE WRAN TO GIVE ASSURANCES THAT THERE IS NO PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THESE PROGRAMS NOW.

C. IN THE BACKGROUND IS THE INCALCULABLE EFFECT OF THE FEDERAL LABOR PARTY'S DISARRAY ON THE STATE LABOR PARTY'S PROSPECTS. GENERAL OPINION SEEMS TO BE THAT THERE MUST BE SOME RUBOFF BUT THE EXTENT IS UNCLEAR. POSSIBLY LIBERAL SENATOR TOWNLEY'S TABLING IN THE FEDERAL SENATE OF AN ALLEGED LETTER WHICH REVIVES THE IRAQI FUNDS SCANDAL IS A LAST MINUTE EFFORT TO REMIND THE VOTERS OF THE FEDERAL LABOR PARTY'S DISGRACE.

4. PERHAPS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IS THE TENDENCY OF INDEPENDENT VOTERS, WHEN NOT GALVANIZED BY SOME OVERWHELMING ISSUE, TO CONTINUE IN OFFICE THE KNOWN IF UNDISTINGUISHED GOVERNMENT RATHER THAN RISK A CHANGE TO AN UNKNOWN ONE. IF THIS PROVES TO BE THE CASE, THEN THE WILLIS COALITION GOVERNMENT WILL PROBABLY REMAIN IN OFFICE WITH A VERY NARROW CONFIDENTIAL

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MAJORITY.

5. ON THE OTHER HAND, RECALLING THE STUNNING FEDERAL LANDSLIDE LAST DECEMBER, ONE CANNOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT AUSTRALIA IS EXPERIENCING A COUNTRY-WIDE SHIFT AND THAT PREMIER WILLIS IS NOT REPEAT NOT SIMPLY JUFFING AND PUFFING WHEN HE SUGGESTS, AS HE IS QUOTED IN THE PRESS TODAY, A POSSIBILITY OF A

25 SEAT COALITION MAJORITY. IN A SIMILAR
VEIN MINISTER OF LABOR AND INDUSTRY HEWITT YESTERDAY
TOLD ME HE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF THE LIBERALS
GAIN A HALF-DOZEN SEATS. A RESULT OF THIS KIND WOULD
INDEED SUGGEST A GENERALIZED SHIFT TO THE RIGHT.
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